

Project: La Cena

(Central Texas Education for Nutrition Advancement)



**SAN ANTONIO
COLLEGE**

One of the Alamo Community Colleges



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Abstract

The rate at which minority students enroll in and graduate from college, and the increasing prevalence of obesity (USDA Goal 5/Objective 2) presents challenges for American society. Project La Cena (Central Texas Education for Nutrition Advancement), Spanish for supper, aims to address these challenges. San Antonio College, partnering with the University of the Incarnate Word and Texas State University to implement Project La Cena, will create a learning community of students who will progress through the educational pipeline which, by 2011, will increase the number of students who (1) **declare** Nutrition as a major to 34; (2) are **retained** as Nutrition majors at the college level to 64.5%; (3) **transfer** to the University of the Incarnate Word or Texas State University to complete their degree to 28; and (4) are **retained** as Nutrition majors at the university to 78% at University of the Incarnate Word, and 89% at Texas State University.

Through financial assistance, academic advising and a learning community environment in which students receive support services, participation in professional conferences, field trips to universities and to the Texas USDA Children's Nutrition research center, and attendance at monthly lecture series presentations, Nutrition majors will receive an enriched education resulting in academic success and additional Nutritionists in the Nation's workforce.

Rigorous evaluation of Project La Cena will provide the project leadership with information to adjust project activities to ensure Project La Cena attains its expected outcomes by 2011. The summative evaluation results will be disseminated via professional conference presentations and publications.



Collaborating Institutions

Project: La Cena is a unique collaboration between two campuses of a community college which is a HSI (San Antonio College and Northeast Lakeview College), a private university which is a HSI (University of the Incarnate Word), a public university (Texas State University), and the USDA through Debra L. Owens, Area Civil Rights Manager in south Texas

La Cena's Goals and Objectives

La Cena's goals are to

- Improve the nation's nutrition and health (USDA strategic goal)
- Promote healthier eating habits and lifestyles (Objective 5.2)
- Increase the number of graduates with BS degrees in the food and agricultural sciences (HSI Program Goal) by addressing USDA Educational Areas:
 - o Recruitment and retention services
 - o Experiential learning opportunities for underrepresented students
- Increase the quality of postsecondary nutrition instruction (HSI Program Goal)

It will do this by increasing the

- # of students who declare nutrition as a major
- # of students retained at San Antonio College
- # of students who transfer to UIW or TSU to complete an undergraduate degree in nutrition
- # of students retained by the universities in nutrition

South Texas is an area with a large minority population and Project: La Cena will target traditionally underrepresented populations in its recruitment and retention efforts. The project's goals will be attained through recruitment of students from high schools in the service area of the community colleges who have minority enrollments of 44-98% of students, and recruitment from students already enrolled in community college classes – especially those enrolled in allied health, the sciences, and kinesiology. A robust web site will also aid in recruitment, and hands-on workshops provided by the two universities will allow them to recruit from the La Cena students.

Retention is always an issue at community colleges and universities. To enhance retention Project: La Cena will provide \$80,500 in scholarships (\$58,000 from USDA, \$22,500 from San Antonio College); academic support to enrolled students which includes tutoring and advising; and mentoring of community college students by university students. It will provide students' access to nutrition professionals through membership in the San Antonio and Texas Dietetic Associations, and attendance at the meetings of these organizations. Students will also take field trips to UIW, TSU, and USDA-ARS in Houston, TX.

Beneficiaries of the Program

Initial beneficiaries of the program will include the students who will receive funding and academic support from the community college, and mentorship from the universities and professionals in the field of nutrition. Ultimate beneficiaries of the program will include the citizens of south Texas who will benefit from having well-trained professionals in the growing field of nutrition and health.



Project Assessment

Two major components comprise the comprehensive evaluation design. These include: (1) an ongoing assessment of the project implementation process to increase the number of underrepresented students who declare a nutrition major and an increase in the transfer rate of the nutrition majors (formative evaluation) and (2) annual assessment of the expected student success outcomes (summative evaluation). The formative project evaluation includes documentation, collecting data, and reporting progress on the project objectives and the corresponding activities and strategies. The summative evaluation will assess the progress made in achieving the four stated project objectives. The expected outcomes will be used to gauge whether the efforts put forth toward the project yielded the desired outcomes in recruiting, retention and transfer rates.



Expected Impact

The expected impact of this program includes an increase in Hispanic education levels in the area of nutrition. Ultimately, this will help ameliorate the incidence of obesity in the south Texas region and nation by providing more well-trained nutritionists in this area.